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Saint Petersburg Center for the History of Ideas
2020

Krihtova , T & Penttilä , M 2020 , A minority within a minority : Russian Evangelicals in Finland negotiating their identity and establishing their presence in society . in I Mikeshin (ed.) , Eight Essays on Russian Christianities . Saint Petersburg Center for the History of Ideas , Saint Petersburg , pp. 156-180 .

http://hdl.handle.net/10138/319280

unspecified
publishedVersion

A Minority within a Minority: Russian Evangelicals in Finland Negotiating Their Identity and Establishing Their Presence in Society

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Introduction. Russian speakers in Finland

Since 1990, the number of Russian speakers in Finland has grown. Whereas at the end of the 1980s there were between 2,000 and 5,000 Russian speakers living in the country, by the beginning of 2018, the number was 77,177 (Statistics Finland 2018a). The biggest wave of migration to Finland from the Soviet Union—and later from Russia and other independent states—began in 1990 when descendants of seventeenth-century Finnish emigrants to the St Petersburg region got permission to return to Finland. The definition of a Finnish re-migrant was based on Finnish identity, which was thought to consist of knowledge of the Finnish language and customs and acceptance of the Lutheran faith. In practice, the group of re-migrants was ethnically, linguistically, and culturally heterogeneous (see e.g. Davydova and Heikkinen 2004: 176, 177; Davydova 2009).

Today, Russian speakers are the largest foreign-language group in Finland, constituting approximately 21 percent of the country's immigrant population (Statistics Finland 2018a). Most of them have moved to Finland from Russia and Estonia (Statistics Finland 2018b). Russian speakers are a heterogeneous group: they have various ethnic backgrounds and come from different countries (including Russia, Estonia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan). Originally, a considerable portion

of the Russian speakers in Finland were ethnic Ingrian-Finnish re-migrants and their family members of various ethnicities, but today, work, family and studies have become major reasons for Russians to move to Finland (Migri 2019; see also Varjonen et al. 2018; Mähönen and Yijälä 2016). In recent years, the number of Russian speakers has increased, with between 2,000 and 4,000 persons arriving annually (Varjonen et al. 2018).

The Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland is the majority church, with approximately 70 percent of people officially being its members. The other national church is much smaller: just over one percent of the population (Statistics Finland 2018b) are members of the Finnish Orthodox Church (Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople). Both churches have the same rights and equal position before the law, including the right to levy taxes from their members.

Russian-speaking migrants have different religious identities. People with Russian or other Slavonic self-identity often consider themselves Orthodox. At the same time, ethnic Ingrian Finns were supposed to be Lutherans. In practice, however, most Russian speakers in Finland have no religious affiliation: 77.5 percent of them are not members of religious organizations registered in Finland. Some 13.5 percent of those who define Russian as their native language belong to Orthodox churches (Moscow and Constantinople patriarchates) and slightly more than 8 percent belong to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland. Less than one percent belong to other registered religious organizations (Statistics Finland 2017, Email communication). Official statistics, however, do not reveal how one identifies oneself in religious terms. For example, in Russia, regarding oneself as Orthodox does not necessarily mean official belonging to a church institution, as one does not need to officially register church membership. It has also been estimated that there are more than 10,000 migrants in Finland who attend the Finnish Orthodox Church—mainly from Russia and Eastern Europe, but also from Oriental Orthodox countries—but they have not registered themselves officially (Metso 2017). The statistics also do not reveal affiliation to religious organizations registered outside the borders of Finland.

All in all, Russian speakers in Finland are more likely to identify with Orthodoxy than Protestant or Evangelical faith. Russian Evangelical Christians in Finland are a small but interesting phenomenon.

In Finland, the word "Evangelical" is easily associated with the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and one of its local revivalist movements, the Evangelical movement. However, there are not so many Lutherans in Russia, and in Russian, like in English, "Evangelical" usually means a set of younger Protestant churches including Baptists, Conservative Pentecostals, Neo-Pentecostals, and Adventists. Quite often it is not easy to define any church as Evangelical based on its theology and organizational structure; churches usually identify themselves simply as "Christian". Because of the historical situation in post-Soviet countries, such churches are friendly to each other. There are three main church unions and several unregistered churches in Russia, (see Lunkin 2014), but in fact belonging to the same union does not mean close relationship between churches. Sometimes churches which are friendly to each other can belong to different unions but have common projects because of friendship between their clergy. In Finland, such churches usually belong either to the Evangelical Free Church of Finland or the Finnish Pentecostal Church, but there are also an increasing number of independent Evangelical and Charismatic churches in Finland which are only unofficially linked with other churches and act as registered organizations—since in Finland it is much easier to found a registered organization than a religious organization (see e.g. Religions in Finland 2019; Ketola and Sohlberg 2011).

The churches investigated here have characteristics which Timothy Larsen (2007) has defined as typical for Evangelical churches: (1) Protestant fundamentalism, (2) belonging to a network arising from the eighteenth-century revival movements, (3) ascribing the Bible with preeminence and the final authority in matters of faith and practice, (4) believing in the idea of reconciliation with God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and (5) believing in the work of Holy Spirit in the life of individuals.

The Russian speakers living in Finland who belong to Evangelical minority churches are a unique and absorbing topic of study in relation to ethnic, language and religious identity as well as the sense of belonging and understanding of space in Finland and the global Christian church. Like all Russian speakers, their identity is a complicated issue, because they have common native language but ethnically they are heterogeneous (Statistic Finland 2012). Evangelical churches have one

more identity characteristic: these are not regarded as traditional but marginal, both in post-Soviet countries and in Finland. In this situation, their members are in a doubly marginal position: in relation to both other Russian-speaking migrants in Finland and to Finnish society.

Identity formation and migrant social action

The case of Russian Evangelical Christians in Finland shows how moving to a new country and integration are reflected in the identity formation of believers, and how religion influences finding one's place in a new country, reflected here as establishing a grassroots organization for one's own linguistic group. Anthropologist Helen Kopnina (2005) studied Russian migrants in London and Amsterdam, showing that they are highly diverse (both socially and in adaptation strategies) and reject the idea of their belonging to a "community." They rather form "sub-communities" or groups based on social, ethnic, class, interest and other distinctions (both inclusive and exclusive).

Roger Brubacker and Frederic Cooper (2000) have summarized the main uses of identity in the social sciences: (1) a ground or basis of social or political action, (2) a collective phenomenon, sameness of a group or a category, (3) an aspect of individual "selfhood," (4) a product of social or political solidarity, or (5) the product of multiple and competing discourse. This means that identity is an ambiguous term which every researcher needs to clarify. Daniel Innerarity (2008), for instance, argues that identity is not the final destination of personal development; it is always a process and people are looking for their own identities all the time. The migration process is even more multifaceted: moving to live in a different country causes migrants to review their identity.

In this article, identity is comprehended broadly as an individual's sense of self, that is reflected in individual narratives and behaviour. From a sociological perspective, identity is constructed in a certain environment. Belonging to a particular place may be central to one's identity and may provide a shortcut through diverse identity labels to define who we are. The more complex a society is, potentially the more fluctuating identity is (Häger 2018: 195). According to Somers (1994: 613-614), people construct their identities—although multiple and changing—by locating themselves or being located within a highly varied, yet limited repertoire of available social, public and cultural narratives. The narratives are stable but mutating, since

transcultural encounters, cultural imitations and borrowings as well as diasporic diffusions are part of the present (e.g., Casanova 2006). Thus, individual identity always reflects time and place, the social and societal context in which the individual lives (e.g., Giddens 1991). Society's reactions shape the experiences of Evangelicals, too. Thus, by studying them, we also broaden the understanding of Russian speakers in Finnish society. Individual identity reflects not only their current home, but also their former home country and the transnational space in which migrants act. The Evangelical communities and their identity talk are reflected in individuals' identity narratives.

Ethnicity is another form of identity. Eriksen (2001) defines ethnic identity as a phenomenon when members of a group or community believe that they descend from the same tribe or from the same ancestors. This belief may be based on myths rather than facts and is often difficult to prove. For Eriksen, ethnic identity is influenced by language, self-designation and historical memory. Schöpflin writes that an ethnic group can define itself through a huge number of values (history, territory, mentality), yet language is the central marker of ethnic identity. For people from Eastern Europe, the significance of language is particularly strong: ethnicity is primarily determined by language, which is much more important than citizenship. For ethnic minorities, language becomes a simultaneous tool and goal (Schöpflin 2000).

In this article, we study social action and identity together. Identities guide actions and are manifested in behaviour; in this particular case, how Evangelical believers constitute their presence in Finland. People construct their identities by attaching to cultural and institutional formations that are larger than a single individual; they also affiliate to intersubjective networks, institutions and macro stories (Somers 1994: 619). Thus, we aim to study how migrants act in society to organize themselves in their new home country using religious and ethnic meanings, and what kind of identity they negotiate in this situation.

Focus, materials, methods

The article analyses selected Evangelical Russian-speaking worship communities in Helsinki. The research task is addressed through three questions:

1. How were these churches founded in Finland?
2. How do they negotiate their identity as Russian minority churches in Finnish society?
3. How have they acted to establish their existence and space in society?

The data used here come from interviews, participant observation and texts that Russian-speaking churches have produced. The main sources were participant observation and interviews with ministers and congregants. Other sources include the churches' Internet presence (websites, Facebook and Instagram pages, online services) including testimonies of members' faith stories, sermons, online prayers and historical reviews. Between 2012 and 2015, Tatiana Krihtova conducted participant observation of divine services, Bible-study groups, communication of congregants, street evangelization and other activities. Participants responded positively; some of them told the researchers that the situation in their community was interesting and that studying it would improve comprehension of the situation and legal consolidation of these churches in Finland. They were ready to be interviewed and cooperate in other ways. All of the informants participated fully voluntarily and knew they were talking to researchers of either theology and sociology of religion (Maija Penttilä) or cultural anthropology (Tatiana Krihtova). Participants were informed about audio record keeping and field diaries. All the recording equipment was visible during the interviews. The methodological benefit of this article is that different sources of data were collected by two researchers. We have sociological, theological and anthropological expertise and we take a multi-method approach.

Founding Russian churches in Finland

The focus here is on two churches in Helsinki: The Russian Free Church in Helsinki Ark of Salvation (*Russkoiazychnaia svobodnaia cerkov g. Khelsinki Kovcheg Spaseniia*) and the Power to Change (*Sila Peremen*). They are not the only churches for Russian speakers in Helsinki but are rather representative ones.

Ark of Salvation is nowadays the biggest Russian-speaking Protestant congregation in Helsinki. It was established by Russian-speaking migrants in 2000, to provide an opportunity for all Russian-speaking Christians from different Protestant denominations to

worship in their mother tongue. This church has its own building in the centre of Helsinki which they bought in 2015. They have a youth group, Sunday school, and praise group. Every summer they organize camps in the countryside for different age groups. Members gather for worship and prayer four times a week and they have home cell groups (We believe n. d.).

According to its own official film (Ark of Salvation Church, Helsinki, 2011), the church identifies itself with the community of "Russian Fellowship of Evangelical Christians in Finland" which was created in Helsinki by evangelist Maria Smirnova (Nichols 2011: 147). This church operated in Helsinki from 1907, when Finland was a Grand Duchy of Russian Empire, to 1918. Many of its members left and moved to Russia after Finland's independence, during the civil war in 1918. Those members who stayed registered their movement in 1921 as the "Russian Evangelical Church in Finland" (Nichols 2011: 146). However, there is no "genetic" relationship between this community and Ark of Salvation. Most likely, this connection was negotiated in order to emphasize the legitimacy of their historical presence in Helsinki. Furthermore, there is a Baptist church in the Greater Helsinki area called Bethany (*Vifania*), which now has some 20 members and also claims to be a successor of Smirnova's community. In 2017, they celebrated the church's 110th anniversary (see Russian Baptist Church n. d.).

In 2012 Ark of Salvation had nearly 130 members. In 2014, there were nearly 150 churchgoers, and in 2016, they officially had a list of 129 adult members, not counting children. The numbers were cited in several interviews and visual observation confirmed them.

One feature makes Ark of Salvation unique. In their home countries, all members of the congregation belonged to different Evangelical denominations. The minister of the church, Petr Potapenko, told that there are people from seven or eight different Evangelical denominations. Most of the congregants are from Baptist and Pentecostal churches but there are also people from other Evangelical denominations. According to our observations, worship on Ark of Salvation (music, appearance of parishioners, mode of speech) looks like the worship of a Conservative Pentecostal or Baptist church. This situation is particular because these congregations differ in their teaching and rituals. One of the disagreements concerns the

phenomenon of glossolalia (speaking in tongues), which is common practice in Pentecostal churches, but unacceptable among Baptists. Glossolalia is an emotional personal experience which, according to Pentecostal teaching, is received for the first time in what is called the baptism to the Holy Spirit. After that, they may "speak in tongues" during personal and common praying. They explain it as a communication with the Holy Spirit. Glossolalia sound incomprehensible, but Pentecostals have explained it as an ability to speak in a foreign language, either a real one or the "angels' language". Usually Pentecostals claim that while speaking in tongues they edify themselves, pointing to the biblical text: "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church" (1 Corinthians, NASB). Baptists reject glossolalia in their practice. Usually they explain it as hysterics or even as demon possession (Porublev, 1957).

In Ark of Salvation, the Pentecostals are encouraged not to speak in tongues from the stage but may speak quietly during common prayer. The minister of the church explained that congregants try to deal with this issue as well as possible and especially Sunday services reach a compromise so that everybody tries to the respect practices of different denominations. However, some congregants regarded this as a current issue which caused contradictions.

Power to Change mainly consists of a group of former members of Ark of Salvation who felt the need to found a church of their own. Its history goes back to 2013, however, when a group of Russian-speaking young people from the north-eastern Estonian town of Jõhvi moved to Finland to establish a church. In the beginning, it was a new branch of the Estonian Methodist Church. In 2014, the youth minister of Ark of Salvation, with a group of 20-30 young believers and some families, left Ark of Salvation and joined this new church, which they now started to call Power to Change. The new church got its blessing from the Estonian Methodist congregation in Jõhvi.

In the beginning, services were held in the United Methodist Church building in Helsinki, with a separate service in Swedish. Then the community moved to another building because of scheduling problems. This move is seen as the beginning of Power to Change as a separate church.

The new church had an active vision and mission. They had a plan to protect all initiatives of Russian-speaking Evangelicals throughout Finland by establishing a network of friendship churches. Power to Change declared its own responsibility for establishing Russian-speaking churches in other regions, aiming to have a "Russian community in every city of Finland" (Sila Peremen 2016).

Based on the style of text, music and behaviour of congregants, this church was mostly oriented to young people. It looked more like the big youth Charismatic churches in Russia and elsewhere, which are not very like Methodist ones in terms of visual image or ritual.

Power to Change has two worship services during the week: on Sunday in the church building and on Tuesday an online service, Praying Hill, during which active church members meet on Malminkartano hill in Helsinki and pray about current topics. It is the only Russian Evangelical church in Finland to broadcast both its regular services online. Furthermore, it has home groups for Bible study and other purposes, such as language teaching and sports. Power to Change has some social projects: concerts in nursing homes and voluntary cleaning services. The church has groups in social media networks, following marketing principles. It is obvious that they try to make these groups popular: besides the worship schedule and quotes from the Bible, they also share facts from the personal life of congregants, many photos, information about life in Finland, interesting facts about the Bible and Christianity. The website of the church is very limited, and all the activity happens in social media networks.

The church video team works hard and, as was seen in the observations, this is a trend in contemporary youth groups of these Evangelical churches. They not only broadcast from church meetings but also make music videos for praise groups and other Christian singers as well as video advertising.

Power to Change still belongs to the Estonian Methodist Church, but this fact is not emphasized in the group's activities. The minister, Andrei Hinkonen, explained it like this: "We are under the protection of the Methodist Church but we do not advertise it much. Because we work mainly with unbelievers who do not know anything about the churches or denominations. Our church is called Power to Change and we are a simple Evangelical Protestant Church" (PC_1, November 2015).

Establishing a new church was an opportunity for these people to create a community with their own vision of church, an active mission and social work among different kinds of people (not only migrants from Russia), modern music and light shows, strong communication with Finnish and Russian churches, and an international purpose. They obviously felt they could not realize these tasks in Ark of Salvation.

Negotiating identity

In this part, we analyse the ways in which the congregations and their members negotiate their identity. The issue of personal identity is extremely important for Russian Evangelical Christians in Finland. They talked about it often: in sermons, in personal conversation with each other, and with the researchers. It became obvious that they need to understand their own place in the country, in the Christian world, and in their own ethnic group.

A lot of members of the churches are Ingrian repatriates and their family members who have moved to Finland via the repatriation programme. Nevertheless, the informants did not mention Ingrian self-identity very often. They might use this construct to talk about official issues, but not as their ethnic origin and identification. In her article on relations between diaspora and ethnic identity among Ingrian Finns, Helena Miettinen highlights common traits that characterize Ingrian people: Finnish native language, Lutheran faith, a common homeland and tragic past. The Lutheran church members were united in its view that Finnish identity was inseparable from language (Miettinen, 2006: 110). The only identity characteristic on this list shared by the Evangelical believers studied here is "tragic past." However, this tragic past was more likely perceived as the common past of Russian Evangelical Christians. This identification was highlighted in the interviews, in memories of the persecution of Evangelical Christians during the Soviet anti-religious policy. Some interviewees remembered that "atheism was a hidden religion" and was illustrated in every lesson at school. Many congregants were children of Soviet dissidents (e.g., Baptists and Pentecostals). Often their teachers, classmates and neighbours knew that their families were believers; thus, they were viewed negatively as sectarians. The interviewees were not directly persecuted, but slightly discriminated against.

In contrast, the Soviet period was also remembered as a glorious time when, despite hostility, people became believers and were baptized secretly. Thus, the interviewees viewed their underground, dissident faith as exemplary for everyone. Some believers still held the ideals of underground religious traditions and dissident identity, making them somewhat sceptical of both today's "liberal" Russia and Finland. Researchers are rather united on the fact that renewing and strengthening homeland identity is a central factor in migrant worship communities (Stepick, Rey and Mahler 2009: 7). This was evident in Ark of Salvation through reproducing the former homeland's dissident religious tradition which, for some, became a central identification factor. Furthermore, building one's identity on one's own religious background may also be a counter-reaction to the liberalism of the new home country (see also Furseth and Repstad 2006: 165-179).

Some of the informants came to Finland from Estonia. Most identified themselves as Russian while they lived in Estonia. A woman in the church even mentioned that she lived in a "region for Russians" in Estonia. The Finnish and Estonian Evangelical churches have very strong ties: they often visit each other's Christian conferences and other events. In some families, one of the spouses migrated from Estonia. Children visited the Estonian summer camp, Gideon, every year, but they did not speak Estonian. Congregants of Ark of Salvation often go to an Estonian food shop in Helsinki because it is situated on the next street to the church. They said they missed these products. When some people from Ark of Salvation left this church and became congregants of Power to Change, established by Estonian missionaries in 2013, ethnic identity was not the main reason.

Two interviewees from Ark of Salvation said that they were from Belarus and had moved to Finland because they were married to Ingrian women. They appreciated their ethnic identity and shared stories about their life in Belarus. During the worship, or example when preaching, they used Belarusian words.

Furthermore, in Ark of Salvation, one informant identified herself as a Tatar. This girl mentioned that originally only her mother was a Tatar, but she felt her "Tatar blood" and liked this culture; however, she could not speak the language. She spoke Russian and knew just few words in Tatar. She came to Finland in 2013 from Kazan (the capital of

the Tatar region in Russia), because her father got a job in Helsinki. She seemed well integrated in Finnish society. She was on summer vacation before her last school year. At the time of the interview, she already had a job in a charity shop where she spoke Finnish and future plans for higher education. Moreover, she said that she had friends not only at the church, but in her school too. All of them were Finns or migrants from other countries. Nevertheless, her Tatar identity had an emotional meaning for her.

The same can be said about Ukrainian emotional identity. On 24 November 2015, during the fieldwork, a memorial for the Ukrainian national tragedy, the Holodomor, was observed after the Power to Change worship. People from the church wore traditional Ukrainian shirts (*Vyshyvanka*) and sang a national song. At other times, they had no tensions with Russian people in the church.

Some people in the churches came to Finland from Russia with work or study permits. They identified themselves with Russia and the Russian language. For them, changing one's country of residence to improve one's standard of living did not mean changing ethnic identity. Some of them mentioned that they were proud of their ethnic identity as Russian and did not want to be anyone else.

It seems that, since there are so many ethnic backgrounds in these churches, ethnic questions are sensitive. Nevertheless, some informants mentioned that they try to avoid talking about subjects that might divide people. Congregations also attempted to treasure their communion. Ethnic and national diversity was not underlined but the things which united the members were emphasized, as the following conversation shows:

> Maija: What kind of relations do the Ukrainians and Russians have?
> Ilya: Difficult. [They] are even at war [laughing].
> Alexandra: But the churches are not at war.
> Ilya: In the church, we have better relations. I have heard about an emigrant church, maybe it was in America, where people stopped talking to each other. We have different opinions on the conflict but…
> Alexandra: In the church, at least in our church, politics does not come to church. We try.
> Ilya: We pray for peace. [...] In the church, there are different opinions, so we don't talk about it, because it may break us. We don't talk about stuff that may break us, at least at the church.

> Aleksandra: Because it doesn't help. We more try to pray about it. (AS_11, AS_12, April 2015).[1]

For many Evangelical believers, religious identity is more important than national commitments. Spiritual values and meaning are seen to rise above the conflicts of nation states. Additionally, in Ark of Salvation, the idea of gathering people together is that no matter what congregation people belonged to in their homeland, they were all in Finland now and could pray in Russian together. Ark of Salvation does not have clear doctrines, because people are from different denominations. It is a church with its own vision and comprehension of different issues which is united by the Russian language.

Congregants mention that besides a shared language, people are united by something that they were calling a mystical Russian soul or Russian mentality, which made them completely different from local Finnish people. Some people said the churches helped them to maintain a stable identity, to stay themselves in the reality of a new country. In a Russian church, they could get something more than in the Finnish churches, as one member of Ark of Salvation mentioned. "Mentality is, of course, the most important thing. Naturally, our church is an emigrant church. It is understandable that people come here, and they create their own [church]" (AS_10, June 2015).

Belonging to a Russian-speaking church was also regarded as a sign of faith and spirituality, as more important for the true believer than finances and social position which could have been achieved better by joining the Finnish churches. One member explained:

> I know one thing: if you want to study Finnish well, you will go to the Finnish church. However, in your heart, you want to be a friend with people with a Russian soul. Some people go to the Finnish church because of career or language. Alternatively, some people do not like Russians. Nevertheless, in the last days Russian people want to be with Russians (AS_5, 17 June 2012).

The interviews also implied formation of identity through identification and commitment to Finland. A common identity with fellow citizens was also promoted through representing the majority confession in Finland—unlike in their former homeland. "I don't feel that we

[1] Names of the interviewees are pseudonyms.

would have been regarded as a sect; because a sect is a minority, and the minority is Orthodoxy in Finland, Protestants are the majority" (AS_9, December 2014). Identity talk also includes instrumental negotiations of identities. It is significant and of practical advantage to be recognized. This was expressed in the fact that Power to Change was officially a Methodist church, as one of their members mentioned:

> We have relationships with the Methodist Church in Estonia and everywhere. Somehow it just happened that we also became a Methodist congregation, [but] we don't think so much that we are a Methodist [church], but just, let's say, a Protestant [church]. That we do like it is said in the Bible and if we have to choose, we are a Methodist congregation just because we have good relations with them [...] It is also good to be a Methodist here [...] they are evidently respected in Finland (PC_2, June 2016).

The interviewees also shared Finnish public narratives about building Finnish identity and emotional commitment to Finnish stories. For example, the connection between Finland and the Soviet Union and the fact that Finnish believers smuggled Bibles and other Christian literature from Finland into the Soviet Union were meaningful (see more about Bible smuggling in Latvala 2008). This activity was mentioned in many interviews. It is worth pointing out that this was mentioned to the researcher who is a Finn. The Russian speakers' attention to the Finnish Bible smuggling showed a close connection with Finland and obviously was a public Finnish Christian narrative, intertwining here with identity formation as a Finland Russian. The very positive manner of recounting this reflects a desire to appeal to Finnish people. In Power to Change, the aim was also to form an identity as Finland Russians:

> Many in our congregation have lived in Finland for a long time, and, thus, you necessarily try to adjust to Finland more than to keep holding onto something that is in Russia. Maybe our vision is more to be Russians in Finland and adjust to Finnish culture (PC_2, June 2016).

The community of Russian speakers does not build on similarity — unlike many other migrant groups — since often, the only shared attribute is the Russian language (see, for instance, Kopnina 2005; Davydova 2009). We can see diverse forms of ethnic identity among the

congregants: (1) implied but not used (Ingrian people), (2) territorial (Russian people who moved to Finland from Estonia), (3) emotional (Belarusian, Ukrainian and Tatar), (4) symbolically uniting (the Russian "soul") and (4) leaving ethnic origin behind and joining Finnish narratives. This diversity in ethnic identities encouraged the researched communities to consciously build their feeling of togetherness and identity through compromises. This fact indicates their own understanding of their heterogeneous nature. The congregations tried to take into account their various ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Language is important, but not the only reason for uniting them. The idea of a primordial difference between mentalities is strong and exists parallel to their own ethnic identity. Furthermore, the fact that these churches prioritized religious togetherness and identity over national or ethnic identity is building Russian-speaking communality in a new way. In their identification, social, class and ethnic factors were not as relevant as shared faith.

Establishing their presence in society

Examining Russian-speaking Evangelical Christians in Finland contributes to broadening the understanding of migrant life in a new society—a topic that is closely linked with multifaceted formation of identity. How have the Russian speakers acted to establish their existence and space in society?

First of all, these communities may offer integration to their members simply by being organized, having official status and contacts. "When the immigrants start to organize themselves officially, they become a subject for the local authorities and for national legislation" (Martikainen 2004). The communities may become buffers between the individual and society (see also Bauman 2014). Both church communities had at least formal contacts with Finnish-speaking congregations. Ark of Salvation is an official member of the union of Free Churches in Finland but has no strong connection with Finnish-speaking churches. Power to Change, in contrast, has a lot of contacts in Finland. Their new homepage mentions that the community works with other congregations and cannot fulfil its tasks alone (Sila Church 2018). Officially, Power to Change is a registered organization in Finland. It is not part of any Finnish religious organization; its succession and spiritual blessing come from the Estonian Methodist Church. Ark of Salvation is the

only Russian-speaking Protestant congregation in Finland that has its own church building, making it publicly visible in a local setting. Power to Change also plans to expand its public visibility by buying a church building of its own.

The role of church communities was also evident in their concrete efforts to support integration, through helping with bureaucracy and offering information, language courses, and psychological help. The churches and their members promoted integration in society in very practical ways. These efforts were even higher up the churches' agenda at the beginning of the new millennium, when the majority of Russian speakers, especially those with Ingrian-Finnish roots, had moved to Finland. There were not so many cultural programmes in Russian in Finland then, and churches were offering everyone an opportunity for social gathering.

Many believers from both churches evangelize and go every week to talk to people in shopping centres. Thus, their efforts are directed outward, to other people, communities and society outside their own (see also Elisha 2011: 222). They seek to make their ideas public in local settings; thus, their agency includes attempts to establish their being in a place (see also Caraccioli and Wright 2015: 152).

Social participation in a new country was more difficult for the newcomers. Earlier studies also show that migrants usually only become active after years of adjustment to the new environment (Caraccioli and Wright 2015: 152). The newcomers in the data found it difficult to know how to make their ideas public in the local context: "I don't know how one should evangelize here. In Russia, I would know. I need more time" (AS_11, April 2015). Individuals and society in Finland were seen as more distant, individualized and secular. It appears that the length of time lived in Finland does help social agency.

At the same time, the church community offered a safe place for people and they actually did not need to be active in Finnish-speaking society because they had many things within their own Russian-speaking community: friendship, mutual help, social networking. The church had become a kind of diaspora for them. The fact that Ark of Salvation did not have many outside connections was also justified with religious reasons:

> We are traditional believers, we are sceptical about relationships with people who do not belong to the church. They have a different set of

> interests: concerts, disco… In addition, we said that it is not good if our young people will participate in these. It is not normal (AS_1, May 2012).

For Ark of Salvation, the lack of local connections was a challenge. It lost its most active group who left and founded a church of their own. Many people from Ark of Salvation did not participate actively in Finnish society. They did not speak Finnish very well, they did not have Finnish friends or professional growth in Finland. Church members mostly worked as maintenance personnel and cleaners; some of them had been trained for several years on the courses to have these jobs. Some had real difficulties with getting a job because of their age, qualifications and the general situation in Finland, but others were satisfied with their position (on average life was better for them than for people on a similar social level in Russia). The congregants had limited communication with other, non-religious, Russian organizations. This meant that the church was their only source of communication and assistance. Sometimes they said a phrase that seemed funny to them: "I forgot Russian, but I still cannot speak Finnish". This describes their situation in the country incredibly accurately. The church offered them an opportunity to create a comfortable environment where they not only pray, but also have social life, recreation, education and assistance in difficult issues. This social agency has also created a self-identity for them as emigrants, living in their own emigrant reality. For some of the congregants, their congregations were an island for their own culture and language where they did not need to struggle in a new environment with a non-native language.

However, for others a migrant church was "a liminal point between the past and the future" (AS_12, April 2015). The congregants felt comfortable there, but for some, it was not the best idea to stay in this Russian migrant space; they were interested in learning a Finnish way of life. Many of them had moved from migrant churches to Finnish ones. For others, a movement towards Finnish congregational life would have meant losing their own language, the other people and communion, which were keeping them in the migrant community.

Ark of Salvation provides Finnish translation for attendees' family members although Finnish-speaking spouses of church members do not often visit this church. At present, however, the churches still mainly have Russian-speaking programmes, which indicates the importance of

native language in their identity. "I always say that for Finnish people the best church is Finnish church where the Word of God is taught in their own mother tongue (AS_10, June 2015). The churches did not (yet) focus on other minorities but the common linguistic identity was still a strong connecting factor when contacting or helping other people.

However, during the research period, the vision of language and contacts began to alter slightly in Power to Change. Namely, in 2016, the vision of Power to Change was to "support the life change among all Russian speakers in Finland" (Sila Peremen 2016). The official website of the church then stated that "the vision of the church is to spread the Gospel through the Russian-speaking population in Finland, using home groups, personal relationships with people, services and other activities" (Sila Peremen 2016). Then, the minister said he believed that someday the church would become international, and the worship would be translated into other languages. Two years later, they had broadened their vision to create revival in Finland and Europe as a whole. Their new website states that they have already "brought thousands of Russian speakers to Jesus all over Europe based on media and various church activities" (Sila Church 2018). The community's vision is that in the near future it will open its doors to speakers of other languages, especially Finnish speakers, and help marginalized groups. The church has already started Bible studies in English and plans to start Finnish services. The pastors also dream of having a strong influence on a larger Europe, by establishing an international Bible institute for Europeans (Sila Peremen 2018).

Both churches have a lot of international contacts. Ark of Salvation used to have more contacts in Russia, but these have started to decrease after cultural conflicts with Russians, as the following example shows. The Ark of Salvation organized regular summer camps. Usually in summer they held four camps: for male and female adults, youth and children. But in August 2015 the camp was unusual. That May, the youth minister of the church talked about it as a big achievement for their international work: the church invited people from the Light to the World church, which is located in the Russian town of Kamensk-Uralsky. This is a small town in the Ural region, 100 kilometres from Ekaterinburg (the regional capital and nearest airport). Light to the World is a conservative Pentecostal

church. Women of all ages wear skirts and scarves all the time, they do not use electric guitars during praise, and all of them speak in tongues. More than 20 people of different ages (mostly youth, the minister with his wife, and several other adults, but no children) came to Helsinki in their own bus. The trip to Finland took them five days, since it is more than 3000 kilometres from Kamensk-Uralsky to Helsinki, and five more days to get back. For all of these people it was the first (and for some of them probably the only) visit to the European Union. We need to clarify that for the trip all of them obtained international passports, visas and permission to travel, which is rather expensive for people from a small Russian town.

Summer camp and a Sunday worship in the church building were the only events that they visited in Finland. They came in the evening before the camp on Wednesday and returned to Russia the day after the end of the worship, on Sunday, a total of four nights in Finland. They did not walk in Helsinki or visit any museums or see the seaside (some of them had never seen the sea). However, they did not look disappointed. They said that communication and common worship were the main aims of the trip and it seemed true for them. The members of Ark of Salvation needed Russian-speaking friends and like-minded people. The three-day summer camp was held on a forest campsite near Lahti. It included worship, sports, sauna, fishing, table games and music making. During the camp people from Russia led all the worship and praise with their own musical instruments. For the Finnish youth it was an unusual situation. Only few of them were able to play instruments or preach.

One important reason for Light to the World to visit Finland was mentioned as the "fiancé issue." Light to the World is an old church facing a typical problem for a closed marginal group—inbreeding. The church members honestly said that they came to Finland to find some girls to marry young men from their church. During the informal communication they talked a lot about advantages of life in Kamensk-Uralsky: beautiful nature, organic food, comfortable houses and opportunities for Christian employment, for example the church has established several agricultural and construction enterprises where only its own members work. This situation was like a weird joke for female members of Ark of Salvation, who had a Finnish education, spoke more than three languages, were integrated well in the local society and had plans to make a career in Helsinki.

They said to each other that they could not understand how it is possible to live in the Ural region. No-one from Ark of Salvation moved to Kamensk-Uralsky.

After that, Ark of Salvation stopped holding international summer camps. It seems the camp in 2015 was an initiative of the Russian church. Ark of Salvation is open for communication, but quite passive for organizational work.

Power to Change, in contrast, saw the change in their agency and position in relation to Finland and other Western countries. After *perestroika* and the liberalization of the Soviet religious policy, Western missionaries founded new churches in Russia and other post-communist countries (see e.g. Pelkmans 2009; Wanner 2004; Penttilä 2014). Now Russian speakers have founded churches in Finland and the direction of transnational movement of values and religious views may be said to be changing: believers from Russia and Eastern Europe now influence Western societies. This implies active agency in the transnational role of Russian-speaking churches in Finland. For example, Power to Change has organized the Hope Festivals, Russian-speaking evangelizing events, in 2015 and in 2016 in the centre of Helsinki. Believers from Russia and Eastern Europe helped to make the festivals happen. This was clear from their video:

> We remember a time when American, European preachers came to the Soviet Union to spread the Gospel in English, which needed to be translated into Russian. Today we are seeing a reverse picture. And to be honest I am proud that today Russian-speaking people from the former Soviet Union, or the former Eastern bloc, communist countries, now go to spread the Gospel on the streets of Europe, and need translators to translate it into the local language, Finnish (Hope Festival 2016).

Power to Change has international plans, as mentioned before, to open a Bible institute for Europeans. They are also trying to find sponsors from abroad, for example from rich Methodist congregations in the United States. However, since they do not see their community through any denominational lens, they have contacts with Pentecostals, Hillsong Church and many neo-charismatic and Evangelical churches around the world.

Conclusion

The article reveals that the theology and identity formation of communities influence the behaviour of believers in migration situations. Religious togetherness and belonging may become more important than national identifications. Russian-speaking Christian life in Finland is not very active and diverse, but the existing churches form different types of Evangelical community. Evangelical Christianity is heterogeneous: people establish churches with their own preferred structure, representation and relationships, so each church can find its own type of congregants. In this situation, migrants from post-Soviet countries to Finland have an opportunity to choose not only Russian or Finnish speaking congregations but a community that meets their ideal of a full spiritual life. Based on his or her religious needs and the position which he or she wants to take in the new country, a new migrant can choose either the more conservative Russian Evangelical alternative or the one focused more on social outreach and social integration into Finnish society. Moreover, a new church can be born as a response to a situation in an existing congregation.

The theological differences between Ark of Salvation and Power to Change are not large. One area in which their members do differ markedly is their attitude to the past, that is, whether to maintain their former identity and an emigrant church life or to change and assimilate in the society to which they migrated. This was why a new church was founded in our research period. Members of the new church, Power to Change, called themselves "Finland Russians" an expression comparable to the name for one traditional Finnish national linguistic minority, the Finland Swedes. This choice of name shows that they are well integrated in Finland.

The identity of Russian-speaking people is in many ways a complicated topic. Like all Russian speakers, the congregants have a common native language but ethnically they are heterogeneous identifying, for example, as Russians, Ingrian Finns, Ukrainians, Belarusians or Tatars. They also come from various countries and denominational backgrounds. Furthermore, the concept of a primordial "Russian soul" or "Russianness" unites congregants in both churches, despite their native language, country of origin, religious denomination and personal feelings.

One interesting peculiarity is (some) informants' opinion that Russianness creates an opportunity for pure worship and communication with other Christians. Conservative theology in combination with Russianness is seen as very trustworthy, offering a feeling of familiarity and even ultimately bringing salvation. This vision partly contributed to their distance towards the Finnish society around them. For some, joining the majority Protestant denomination in Finland signals a change in their identification from being in a minority in Russia towards feeling part of the majority in Finland.

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AS_10—M, 65.
AS_11—M, 26.
AS_12—F, 28.
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